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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001474

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM VE

SUBJECT: FIRST VENEZUELAN NATIONAL FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS

CLASSIFIED BY: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.4 (D)  
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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (U) AT A HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM ORGANIZED BY THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND JUSTICE (MIJ) GOV SPEAKERS DISMISSED ALLEGATIONS OF VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DISTURBANCES FROM FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 5. SENIOR MIJ OFFICIALS CONTENDED THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ARE MULTIFACETED, AND THE GOV IS ADVANCING SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS; SECURITY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT HUMAN RIGHT OF ALL PEOPLE; THE DEMONSTRATORS VIOLATED THE PUBLIC'S RIGHT TO TRANSPORTATION, AND WORK. PRESIDENT CHAVEZ TOLD THE AUDIENCE THAT THE GOV'S SOCIAL MISSIONS (EDUCATION, HEALTH CARE) "HAVE OPENED A NEW HORIZON FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, RECOGNIZED NOW BY THE WORLD." END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) THE MIJ DIRECTORATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZED THE "FIRST NATIONAL FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE BOLIVARIAN CONSTITUTION OF VENEZUELA OF 1999" ON APRIL 27 AND 28. POLOFF ATTENDED SOME OF THE PROCEEDINGS. SPEAKERS INCLUDED THE ENTIRE LEADERSHIP OF THE MIJ, ALONG WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER GOV ORGANISMS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS PORTFOLIOS, INCLUDING THE ARMED FORCES AND THE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE. A NUMBER OF SPEAKERS FROM GOV SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND MISSIONS SPOKE ABOUT ECONOMIC HUMAN RIGHTS. PLANNING FOR THE FORUM BEGAN IN JANUARY, ACCORDING TO MIJ DG OF HUMAN RIGHTS MAYERLING ROJAS VILLASMIL, BEFORE ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY STATE SECURITY FORCES IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH.

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INTERIOR MINISTER LUCAS RINCON  
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¶3. (C) MINISTER OF INTERIOR AND JUSTICE LUCAS RINCON OPENED THE FORUM WITH AN AGGRESSIVELY DEFENSIVE SPEECH, CALLING THE BOLIVARIAN CONSTITUTION "ONE OF THE MOST ADVANCED IN THE WORLD WITH REGARD TO HUMAN RIGHTS." HE ACCUSED THE OPPOSITION OF USING HUMAN RIGHTS TO DAMAGE THE REPUTATION OF THE GOV INTERNATIONALLY. WHILE ADMITTING THAT THE AMBITIOUS GOALS OF THE CONSTITUTION HAVE NOT YET BEEN FULFILLED, HE ASSURED THE AUDIENCE THAT "THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION IS WORKING ARDUOUSLY TO ALLOW THE PEOPLE TO ENJOY THE ELEMENTAL RIGHTS SUCH AS LIFE, HEALTH, EDUCATION AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, WHICH HAVE BEEN CASTRATED FOR ALL THESE YEARS..." RINCON ATTACKED THE "HYPOCRISY" OF OPPOSITION COMPLAINTS, AND PRAISED GOV STEPS TO PROVIDE SOCIO-POLITICAL RIGHTS TO THE PEOPLE.

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DIRECTOR GENERAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
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¶4. (U) IN HER SPEECH, MAYERLING ROJAS VILLASMIL, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MIJ FOR HUMAN RIGHTS TRIED TO RECAPTURE THE MORAL HIGH GROUND BY DENOUNCING THE OPPOSITION AS HYPOCRITES FOR COMPLAINING ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, AFTER YEARS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES UNDER THE AD AND COPEI GOVERNMENTS. SHE ADMITTED THERE WERE SOME PROBLEMS, AND CALLED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR TRAINING PROGRAMS. SHE CLAIMED THAT NOW WAS THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY THAT THE GOV WAS PUBLICLY TALKING ABOUT IMPROVING HUMAN RIGHTS. SHE SAID HER OFFICE HAD BEEN PLANNING THE EVENT FOR FOUR MONTHS, INDICATING THE EVENTS OF FEBRUARY AND MARCH WERE INCONVENIENTLY RAISING BRUTALITY ISSUES IN A FORUM DESIGNED TO SHOW OFF SOCIAL PROGRESS.

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VICE MINISTER CARLOS BETTIOL  
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¶5. (U) VICE MINISTER FOR INTERNAL RELATIONS AND CITIZEN SECURITY, CARLOS BETTIOL PRAISED THE GOV FOR ITS MULTI-FACETED VIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THE ADVANCED NATURE OF THE BOLIVARIAN CONSTITUTION. HE ATTACKED THE OPPOSITION AND INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS FOR QUESTIONING THE GOV'S DEDICATION TO HUMAN RIGHTS, AND CHARGED THAT THE MEDIA AND OPPOSITION ALSO VIOLATE HUMAN RIGHTS. WHILE ADMITTING THAT THE STATE HAD GREATER RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, HE EMPHASIZED THE PROTECTION OF COLLECTIVE, AND NOT INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS.

16. (U) BETTIOL TOLD THE AUDIENCE THAT WITHOUT SECURITY NO

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LIES ACCUSATIONS

AGAINST VENEZUELAN SECURITY FORCES, DEFENDED THEIR ACTIONS, AND ACCUSED THE MEDIA OF EXAGGERATING ISOLATED INCIDENTS. HE SAID CLAIMS OF TORTURES AND DISAPPEARANCES ARE ALL LIES. BETTIOL ALSO ASSERTED THAT THE DEMONSTRATORS FAILED IN THEIR OBLIGATIONS AS CITIZENS BY VIOLATING OTHER PEOPLE'S RIGHTS TO TRANSPORTATION AND WORK BY BLOCKING STREETS IN THE DISTURBANCES FROM FEB. 27 TO MARCH 5.

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PRESIDENT CHAVEZ CLOSES  
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17. (U) PRESIDENT CHAVEZ CLOSED THE EVENT ON APRIL 28, AGAIN PRAISING THE ADVANCED NATURE OF THE CONSTITUTION. HE POINTED OUT THAT DESPITE "EVERYTHING THAT HAS OCCURRED HERE: COUP D'ETAT, THREATS TO SECURITY, TO SOVEREIGNTY AND DEFENSE, THIS GOVERNMENT... HAS NOT SUSPENDED EVEN ONE CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEE." HE CLAIMED THAT THE SOCIAL MISSIONS THE GOV HAS INITIATED "HAVE OPENED A NEW HORIZON FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, RECOGNIZED NOW BY THE WORLD."

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) IN THIS CONFERENCE, THE GOV ESTABLISHED ITS VISION AND DEFINITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SPEAKERS INDICATE THAT THE ORIGINAL INTENTION WAS TO HIGHLIGHT ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE GOV'S EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE MISSIONS. OFFICIALS REPEATEDLY REFERRED TO THE BOLIVARIAN CONSTITUTION AS THE BASIS BY WHICH THE GOV WILL MEASURE RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, THOUGH THEY DID NOT NEGLECT TO NOTE THEY WOULD ADHERE TO INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED STANDARDS. SIGNIFICANTLY, THEY RAISED COLLECTIVE RIGHTS ABOVE INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS, BLAMED THE VICTIMS OF ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY STATE SECURITY AGENTS FOR VIOLATING THE RIGHTS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC, AND ELEVATED SECURITY ABOVE OTHER RIGHTS. THIS WAS A TIP OF THE HAT TOWARD HUMAN RIGHTS -- A GESTURE -- AND CONTRASTS STARKLY WITH THE GOV'S PERFORMANCE. THE ABSENCE OF ANY SIGNS OF REMORSE OR RECONSIDERATION, DESPITE INTERNATIONAL CONCERN REGARDING THE ALLEGED VIOLATIONS THAT OCCURRED FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 5, SENDS THE MESSAGE TO THE OPPOSITION THAT THE GOV IS PREPARED TO DEFEND ITSELF BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY.

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